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ABSTRACT

A consortium of high schools and colleges in northeast Ohio (Coalition for the High School of the Future), which was formed to revitalize the learning experiences offered at each high school, produced a low budget videotape to generate interest in its proposals for educational reform. The primary objective of the tape was to expand awareness of the project in hopes of involving large numbers of participants in the coalition. The tape was disseminated to all five high schools, where it was shown on repeated occasions, i.e., teachers' meetings, parents' meetings, student assemblies, and workshops. A survey was completed by a team from each school. Results (57 responses) indicate that the videotape was successful in: (1) increasing awareness about the project; (2) effectively informing people about the nature of the project; (3) conveying the impression that improving high schools was an important undertaking; and (4) presenting the project in a favorable light. Respondents also suggested that the visual aspects of the show were critical to its success, i.e., several written comments alluded to the significance of the role played by visuals in communicating to coalition members what the project was all about. It is pointed out that a respectable television program can be produced quite inexpensively; once produced, it has a large potential audience, especially given the proliferation of videocassette recorders in both institutions and homes. A list of references is provided. (JB)

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Using Television to Develop "The High School of the Future"

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The transformation of our schools into institutions more responsive to the needs of today's youth is an urgent challenge, fraught with innumerable difficulties. Such a formidable task requires resourceful approaches and ingenious solutions. One such project, "The Coalition for the High School of the Future" in northeast Ohio, decided to produce a low budget videotape to generate interest in its proposals for educational reform. This television show eventually proved highly successful in communicating the purpose of the project in dynamic fashion. This article will discuss how a considerable degree of interest in the coalition was aroused by this video, and will include the results of a survey that later documented specific ways in which the video helped establish a momentum that has propelled the High School of the Future project into its second year.

This coalition consists of five high schools and four universities in the Cleveland-Akron area. It also eventually hopes to include local community groups and businesses. The project hopes to revitalize the learning experiences offered at these five high schools. These "model" sites differ considerably from one another. They include a nearly all black inner city school, a virtually all white rural school, an affluent white suburban school, an urban "magnet" school, and a school with a racial mix that includes whites, blacks,

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and Hispanics.

Like other school reform projects of its kind that have arisen throughout the country in the past few years, this coalition has sought to facilitate change by encouraging school staff members to initiate their own plans for improving educational standards (McCormack-Larkin, 1985; Miller, Cohen, & Sayre, 1985). Each school established faculty committees to re-examine its educational priorities. A formal proposal for improving the instructional climate within the building would be drawn up, with the emphasis placed upon the developing of more effective methods of preparing young people for living in our rapidly changing society.

While each school would be encouraged to develop appropriate strategies for its own unique circumstances, the coalition leaders offered some suggestions for reform based upon recent research on the state of the American public high school (Boyer, 1983; Goodlad, 1984; Sizer, 1984). Curriculum revision whould be initiated by the teachers themselves. An emphasis upon communications skills would be strongly advised. An expanded teacher contract plan might be considered, to improve salaries and to engage teachers in professional activities through the summer. Team teaching efforts would be encouraged, to reduce some of the isolation of the job and to stimulate an exchange of ideas. Career ladders would be considered, so teachers could advance professionally to positions of instructional leadership.

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Administrators would become active facilitators of positive change, rather than guardians of the status quo. Finally, dynamic new technologies for developing instruction would be acquired and effectively employed. In the spring of 1984, the coalition's leadership deliberated as to how they could most effectively present these recommendations to prospective participants. The possibility of producing a "video proposal" arose, and it seemed a dynamic way to communicate ideas, to publicize the project, and to motivate participants.

The Advantage of a "Video Proposal"

The objectives of the High School of the Future Project were both ambitious and ambiguous. The project needed an identity, in a sense, and a carefully conceived video could help give it one. The television medium can deliver material in very realistic and meaningful ways (Comstock, 1980). Its visual component adds a communication dimension that transcends what a public speaker can convey. In identifying problems to be redressed, actual examples can be shown. In recommending solutions, the possibilities can be staged and taped. Participating personnel can appear in the context of their own institutions so the viewer actually sees who is involved and where this project will be conducted. A tape can provide a "visual survey" of the project, so interested parties can judge its potential merits for themselves.

The coalition wanted to involve as many people as possible, who were associated with each of the five sites.

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Its leadership felt strongly that high schools could only be improved if all concerned parties worked together for change (Hall et al., 1984; Pincus & Williams, 1979). This team would include teachers, administrators, students, university professors, parents, and members of the communities surrounding each high school. To attract the support they needed, project leaders felt a videotape would be ideal. Television can be a powerfully motivating medium (Frank & Greenberg, 1980; Pearl, 1982). Sequences can be carefully planned to portray the project in an extremely positive light. Music can subtly manipulate the emotions. A charismatic sounding narrator can be quite convincing. Because the success of the project depended so heavily upon establishing a broad base of support in its early stages, it was felt a persuasive videotape should be produced, despite the time and expense that might be involved.

Some practical considerations also led the coalition's leadership to commission the tape. In the effort to enlist support for the project, many meetings would be held. A media production is ideal for multiple presentations. A videotape would save project spokesmen from having to repeatedly explain their goals at meeting after meeting. It would also "standardize" the presentation so that all groups received the same information about the project, preventing possible misconceptions and miscommunication later on. In addition, the program would serve as a focal point for discussion between interested parties about the project

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providing a "common ground" around which issues could be debated and deliberated.

The geographically dispersed nature of the project sites presented another problem for the coalition. The five schools were scattered across an area of Ohio ranging from the ghettos of Cleveland to the rolling farmland east of Akron, a distance of approximately fifty miles. Travel time between sites could become both time consuming and expensive. Once again, distribution of tapes could eliminate some of this difficulty.

This particular collection of five high schools was in many ways a microcosm of the nation's schools as a whole.

If these particular schools could successfully evolve into model "High Schools of the Future" the applicability of their cumulative experiences would be considerable indeed. However, if it ever hoped to become a viable, cohesive entity that drew strength from its diversity, the coalition would need to involve the various sites with one another. Up to this point, these five schools had very little contact with one another. A videotape seemed ideal for showing audiences throughout the project what each of the sites was like. It could help begin the process of establishing a network between schools by, in a sense, visually introducing them to one another.

The videotape also had the potential to introduce key

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participants. Interview footage with school principals and highly respected teachers might influence faculty members at each school. There is considerable evidence to indicate that the support of opinion leaders is critical to the success of an institutional change project (Rogers, 1983). In this case, key figures would be identified and then asked to voice their enthusiasm for the project on tape. Their most appropriate remarks would then be edited into the program at various points throughout the show. In this way, perhaps the tape could, to some degree, shortcircuit the lengthy interpersonal persuasion process generally involved in the adoption of innovative ideas (Mancuso, 1969). As it turned out, the videotape production team was fortunate enough to obtain interview footage with John Goodlad, a nationally recognized leader in the high school reform movement. Goodlad's presence on the tape lent the whole project some valuable credibility.

In the spring of 1984, it appeared a "video proposal" might serve as an effective means of clarifying project goals and generating some initial enthusiasm. Consequently, a team of faculty members and graduate students in the educational technology department of Kent State University's College of Education proceeded to produce the program. Production went on for several months, with the vast majority of costs consisting of in-house expenses. Kent State University possessed all the equipment necessary to produce the tape. The faculty members involved were already on salary and the

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students worked on the tape as part of their assistantships. By July of 1984, a seventeen minute program entitled "The High School of the Future" was ready for viewing and was shown to potential funding agencies. That September, it was disseminated to all five schools, where it was shown on repeated occasionsm including teacher meetings, parent meetings, student assemblies, and workshops. How successful was this program in achieving its objectives?

Survey Findings: How Successful was the Tape?

A survey was distributed to each of the five schools in the coalition. It was completed by the members of each school's leadership team, a group of teachers selected by their fellow faculty members to write a proposal for changing aspects of their school. The fifty-seven responses indicated some definite opinions about the impact of the television program on the project in its early stages.

"High School of the Future" Video Survey Results

+2 = strongly agree
+1 = agree
0 = neutral
-1 = disagree
-2 = strongly disagree

Rating	Survey Item
1.26	The videotape has helped make people aware of the project, who otherwise would not know of its existence.
.93	The tape effectively informs people about the nature of the project.
.57	I feel the tape helps clarify certain aspects of the project's "mission" which might otherwise have remained ambiguous or misunderstood.
1.25	The show conveyed the impression that improving our high schools is an important undertaking.

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1.23 The show portrayed the High School of the Future project in a very positive light.

-1.12 An audiotape of the narration would have been almost as effective as the videotape in conveying information about the project.

1.24 Visuals made the narrative material more interesting.

.78 Comments on tape by project participants were especially convincing because they should understand the situation at their own schools.

.93 These remarks by involved staff helped establish the impression that some changes in public high schools are necessary.

.96 The interview footage with staff from each school helped convey a sense of commitment on the part of all five schools.

.93 The tape made me feel my school is part of something larger, which extends across this part of the state.

The scenes of the U.S. space program suggested:

1.30 the future
1.20 technology
1.12 achievement
.80 the frontier
.54 patriotism

What do these survey results indicate about the power of video to publicize? It turned out that there was, in fact, considerable agreement with the statement that "The videotape has helped make people aware of the project, who otherwise would not know of its existence" (rating of 1.26). On open-ended parts of the survey, project participants were free to elaborate, and the following statements were recorded.

"The tape was used effectively in workshops to introduce the public to the project."

"At the first workshop where the tape was shown, a high degree of interest was sparked and continues now."

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"We have had positive involvement from representatives of several groups, after they reviewed the tape." Thus, there was strong evidence that a primary objectives of the tape was accomplished; to expand awareness about the project in hopes of involving large numbers of participants in the coalition.

Did the medium of television provide a clear statement of goals that effectively articulated its purposes? It appears to have been generally successful in this regard also. A average score of .93 was recorded for the statement, "The tape effectively informs people about the nature of the project." A .57 was received in response to the item, "I feel the tape helps clarify certain aspects of the project's mission which might otherwise have remained ambigious or misunderstood." A lower score on this last item was not surprising. The goals of the project were deliberately stated in general terms, so that individual schools could interpret them as they saw fit. Several anecdotal responses indicated that the program provided teachers with a cogent summary of what the project hoped to accomplish and even implied that the show may have served to solidify the coalition.

"It shows the whole program...its was crisp, clear, and to the point."

"The coalition concept was conveyed well."

"The scope of the project seemed so vast to me. I needed a 'cohesive device' (the tape) to bring my

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fragmented ideas and expectations together."

Did the videotape effectively argue the necessity for change, in its efforts to motivate participants? The statement "The show conveyed the impression that improving our high schools is an important undertaking" received considerable support (1.25 rating). Convincing participants that this particular project could be a viable approach to improving the system was also critical. The item "The show portrayed the High School for the Future project in a very positive light" was rated at 1.23. The video was clearly successful in portraying the project as a meaningful one, with good intentions. Some survey comments on this issue were:

"The tape effectively conveyed the desperate need for change."

"It had appeal for all who are concerned with the future of education."

Thus, survey responses supported the informal feedback initially received that "The High School of the Future" tape successfully contributed to publicizing the project, communicating its basic goals, and building support for it. But how was it able to do so? What specific capabilities of video contributed to this success? What production approaches were used to accomplish the tape's objectives? How can educators interested in developing similar tapes for their own projects achieve similar results?

Effectively Presenting Innovative Ideas Through Video

Many items on the survey dealt with production issues. One strength of the television medium is, of course, its ability to present dynamic visuals. The strength of a video presentation at meetings, in comparison with a public address, lies primarily in its ability to provide this visual material. To test the significance of this visual component, several relevant questions were included in the survey. One hypothesized, "An audiotape of the narration would have been almost as effective as the videotape in conveying information about the project." This statement was strongly disagreed with (-1.12). The item "The visuals made the narrative material more interesting" was, on the other hand, strongly agreed with (1.24). Viewers also agreed with the statement "The visuals included in the program enhanced the show by providing specific instances of what the narrator was discussing" (.95). Apparently, the visual aspects of the show were absolutely critical to its success. These results help explain the enthusiasm expressed by coalition leaders over the tape's effectiveness as an opener at meetings about the project. Several written comments alluded to the significance of the role played by visuals in communicating to coalition members what the project was all about:

"A good visual overview of the project."

"It showed the diversity of schools involved."

"It is easier to convey the general aims of the project through visuals."

As mentioned, there was a considerable amount of

interview footage included in "The High School of the Future." Coalition leaders, including both administrators and teachers, expressed their aspirations for the project. Editing allowed the producer to select the most articulately expressed comments and to insert them into the show at appropriate moments. The result was often a meaningful "testimonial" for the project, which gave an impression of commitment, unity, purposefulness, and optimism.

The questionnaire sought to verify whether, in fact, the intended image came across. General agreement was recorded in reaction to the following statements: "The comments on tape by project participants were especially convincing because they should understand the situations at their own schools" (.78), "These remarks by involved staff helped establish the impression that some changes in public high schools are necessary" (.93), "The interview footage with staff from each school helped convey a sense of commitment on the part of all five schools" (.96), and "The tape made me feel my school is part of something larger, which extends all across this part of the state" (.93).

It appears that videotape can effectively present the support of key opinion leaders, something that has been considered critical to the success of any institutional change project. Normally, these kinds of endorsements would be delivered around the school building over a period of weeks, or even months. Videotape streamlines this process, so that large groups can be immediately exposed to these

statements of support. This video approach may thereby help accelerate the change process.

Possibly the most interesting finding on the entire survey was that viewers were definitely affected by a "visual metaphor" included in the show. To suggest the future, a one minute introductory segment was prepared, using NASA footage, in which the viewer "travelled" to the moon and back, then witnessed the launching of the space shuttle. The idea was to immediately remind the viewer that technology is advancing rapidly and that the future is filled with potential changes of enormous magnitude. These technological triumphs also exemplified the kind of achievement that upcoming generations of students will hopefully aspire to.

It was hoped that audiences would be encouraged by such footage, to consider where their high schools were heading and how they would need to adapt to the rapid transformation of our society. Survey responses did, in fact, indicate that the space metaphor was very effective. Teachers responded that "`The scenes of the U.S. space program suggested the future" (1.30), "technology" (1.20), and "achievement" (1.12). These shots also suggested to a lesser degree, "the frontier" (.80) and "patriotism" (.54). When asked to elaborate on this issue, the following reactions were recorded:

"The tape makes you realize the future comes quickly."

"Schools are heading for frontiers unknown."

"Students must be prepared to meet the future."

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"New horizons to explore and new challenges to meet."

"The future is now... it inspires me."

I hope that responses like these, along with the data reported, have convinced many readers that a television program can contribute significantly to the successful initiation of an institutional change project. Today, television is becoming an increasingly cost-effective medium. Video technology is advancing at a remarkable rate. Television portapaks are becoming lighter, easier-to-operate, less expensive, and of higher quality. Obtaining respectable looking, worthwhile footage has become economically feasible for groups which previously found the cost prohibitive. Furthermore, an inexpensive editor, like Panasonic's R-500 (@ $100.00), can be connected between two half-inch recording units, so a program can easily be assembled from raw footage.

A respectable television program can be produced quite parsimoniously these days, especially if there is a person on your staff who is skilled in television production. Once developed, a video has large potential audiences, especially given the rapid proliferation of videocassette recorders in both institutions and homes. We are in the midst of a "video revolution" and those interested in promoting a special project should consider taking advantage of this dynamic medium.

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